

**OuterStage**

A Peer Review for Quality Art ...  
Everywhere

**Performance Art in the Heart of Commercial Street**

Posted on [November 7, 2014](#) by [editor](#)

Manhattan Rep's November Event was a buffet of plays, character studies, and dance-performance pieces exploring the human condition. Program A was a mixed bag of vaudevilles styling (*The Haberdasher* and *Daguerreotype Dialogue #4*) and relationship plays (*Breaking Up is Hard to Do* and *Philoctetes*) and a Gershwin-like dance piece.



The best of the initial program was surely *Philoctetes* by Sander Gusinow. This clever tale weaves the new social mores of the second decade of the 21st century with the myth of an injured Greek soldier. What we got was a well-written neurotic love story filled with witty wise prose that made everyone feel like they were part of a private joke. Kiersten Armstrong and Alessandro Colla looked and sounded like every fractured twenty-something addicted to the internet thanks to schoolyard-into-office peer pressure and derision. It's not easy to play both alienation and attraction – but they handled that obstacle with ease. Mathew Kreiner kept the action brisk with polarized placement of the actors until the defenses were dropped. Gusinow's clever, delicately-sharp wit and understanding of the new majority will take him far as a scribe.

The other standout was the Vanessa Long Dance Company's *Boys Will Be Boys*. This dance piece used the intimate Manhattan Rep stage brilliantly in depicting the nightlife of New York's twenty-somethings (I see a pattern forming here). Like Gusinow's play, "Boys" showed us what is now a norm where once was not, but the agile group took us on train rides; to dance clubs, bars; or just city streets. In some ways it was a cautionary tale, in others a melodic lampoon, but all ways an enjoyable diversion.

Manhattan Repertory Theatre presents:

# THE NOVEMBER EVENT

CRAZYFUN NEW THEATRE

Featuring:

THE REHEARSAL  
by Tatyana Yassukovich

CANAAN  
by Mohammed Saad Ali

IN A HEART BEAT/THE COMEBACK  
by Tony Vozzo

SCARFACE AND THE GIMP  
by John Ladd

THE NEXT DAY  
by Kevin Ray Johnson

SERIES B

Wed. Nov. 5 @ 9 pm, Thurs. Nov. 6 @ 9 pm

For Ticket Reservations email: [MRTRESERVE@GMAIL.COM](mailto:MRTRESERVE@GMAIL.COM) \$20

Please reference show date and number of tickets

Manhattan Repertory Theatre, 303 W. 42nd St. 6th Floor  
[www.manhattanrep.com](http://www.manhattanrep.com)

Program B was a series of character studies starting with a Middle Eastern man's misery in the 21st Century (*Canaan*); a pair of sex starved actors using their acting class as a way to get off (*The Rehearsal*); a stunning riff on the life of a pop/concert performer (*The Comeback*) to two harsh tomes about angry people (*Scarface and the Gimp* and *The Next Day*). *The Rehearsal* and *The Comeback* were very well-done works. The former, a bittersweet exercise in loneliness made truly engaging by some excellent acting. The latter, ironically also a "rehearsal" told the story of a once-famous singer and the ruination his life suffered. Tony Vozzo's lead character was believable and electrifying throughout.

The best of this program was the first piece.



photo by Christopher Sirota

*Canaan* is Mohammed Saad Ali's polaroid shot of Yacub and his family trapped in a world that doesn't respect his kind and forces him into a state of poverty. With a sibling living with him and a baby on the way, Ali's three person character study was both topical and historical. While the news allows us to knowingly nod at this Middle Eastern family's plight, it could have been an Irish family in the 20s; a Jewish family in the 40s; and so on. Yasmine Benjelloun and Molly Baggs Gyllenhaal were an excellent Greek-chorus to Ali's Yacub – displaying equal portions of anger, fear, and humiliation with conviction. This naturalistic piece could be a full play with great ease – as a matter of fact, it should be as there is more story to tell.

The Manhattan Rep opens its doors to pieces that aren't strictly plays but performance art or moments of emotion set to paper. They should be praised and supported because a little room with a breathe of real art is like an oasis on the street with a gigantic MacDonald's marquee.

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